one of the most interesting features of this foreign trade was the earliest known direct contact of China with the peoples of Western Europe. Mongol armies had, as we have seen, penetrated far into Europe and had brought alarm to the sovereigns of the western part of that continent. Travellers from the Mongol possessions must also have reached that region. We know, indeed, of a Uighur (or possibly an Ongut) Xestorian monk, Rabban Cauma (or Sauma) who had been born in Cambaluc and who in 1287 and 1288 visited Rome, Bordeaux, and Paris on a diplomatic mission from the Mongols. We do not know that any of the Chinese reached Western Europe, but, as we have said, we hear of them in Russia.

Compared with some of the states of the time, the kingdoms of Western Europe were then small in area and population and were by no means so important for their contemporaries as were several other realms—China, for example. Nor were they so populous or prosperous. A European traveller in China in the fourteenth century, for instance, declares that the former Sung domains contained "two hundred cities all greater than Venice." In the thirteenth century, however, Western Europe was already displaying some of the beginnings of that remarkable growth which was later to make it dominant in the world's life and whicn six and seven centuries later was to lead it to work the greatest revolution in China in that Empire's history. Even before the birth of Jenghiz Khan and the Mongol advance, the Crusades had carried the arms of Western European peoples into the Levant, and Italian cities had made commercial contacts there.

The thirteenth century saw extensive trade between Italy and the ,Near East. It also witnessed the rise of the Franciscans and Dominicans and with it a new burst of Christian missionary endeavor, both inside and outside of Europe. Given the facility of travel in Asia which the Mongols had created, it would, therefore, have been strange if Europeans had not reached China.

Just how many merchants from Western Europe made the journey to China we do not know. Judging from those of whom our comparatively scanty records tell us, the number must have been considerable. We hear of Genoese and Venetians in China, and of many in Venice who had made the round trip. An Italian trade-guide of the fourteenth century describes one of the routes